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World-Class Chamber Music in the Bay Area

Local chamber groups join forces to bring renowned musicians to the Bay.

BY GEORGIA ROWE



PHOTO BY MARCO BORGGREVE

When violist Pamela Freund-Striplen started the Gold Coast Chamber Players in 1987, she quickly proved a one-woman dynamo. As presenter, performer, artistic director, booking agent, and fundraiser, she earned a loyal audience for her expertly curated programs. Her efforts have paid off; with concerts now at the Lafayette Library and Learning Center and at the Piedmont Center for the Arts, the group is thriving.

This month finds her taking Gold Coast to a new level. In her new venture, the Bay Area Music Consortium, Freund-Striplen joins with three additional presenters—Berkeley Chamber Performances, Mill Valley Chamber Music Society, and San Francisco's Noe Valley Chamber Music—to attract top-level chamber groups for special concerts. On February 9 in Lafayette, she'll introduce the Consortium's inaugural program, featuring the acclaimed St. Lawrence String Quartet performing works by Beethoven, Haydn, and Bay Area composer Jonathan Berger. In the concert's highlight, the brilliant clarinetist Todd Palmer joins the quartet in "The Dreams and Prayers of Isaac the Blind" by Argentine composer Osvaldo Golijov. Repeat performances take place in San Francisco on February 10, in Berkeley on February 12, and in Marin on February 17.

Banding together with other presenters has had a synergistic effect, Freund-Striplen notes. "To me, it's a metaphor for chamber music itself," she says. "Each time we meet, we discover new things and learn from each other. We're already designing next season."

For tickets to the Lafayette performance, visit gcplayers.org; for the Berkeley concert, go to berkeleychamberperform.org.

More Classical Highlights

Explore the region's rich orchestral offerings this February.

Goldberg Variations, Redux

Under director Daniel Levenstein, Chamber Music San Francisco brings a distinguished lineup of international musicians to Walnut Creek for the 12th year. Kicking off the season is the Amsterdam-based wind quintet Calefax. Known for its wide-ranging musical interests, the group performs its own arrangement of Bach's fiendishly challenging *Goldberg Variations*. Works by Gesualdo, Locatelli, Debussy, and Wesley complete the program. *February 9, Leshar Center for the Arts, Walnut Creek, chambermusicsf.org.*

**Global Movement**

Hear rhythms from around the world when the Contra Costa Chamber Orchestra plays Bartok's *Romanian Folk Dances*, Tchaikovsky's *Sleeping Beauty* suite, and the Debussy/Ravel *Sarabande* at two East Bay venues. In the program, titled *Let's Dance*, pianist Jeffrey LaDeur joins the orchestra to perform Liszt's darkly dramatic *Totentanz*. *February 16, El Campanil Theatre, Antioch; February 17, Leshar Center for the Arts, contracostachamberorchestra.org.*

Danish Delights

Lauded for its youthful verve and mature musical insights, the Danish String Quartet has risen to the top ranks of the chamber music world. Expect to be dazzled when the musicians perform works by Haydn, Webern, and Beethoven at UC Berkeley. *February 17, Hertz Hall, Berkeley, calperformances.org.*

Planetary Excursion

Diablo Symphony Orchestra travels the solar system with *The Planets*. Music director Matilda Hofman conducts Holst's brilliant orchestral suite, accompanied by the choral ensemble WomenSing. Also on the program: a piece featuring the winner of the Yen Liang Young Artist Competition. *February 24, Leshar Center for the Arts, diablosymphony.org.*